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THE PROVINCETOWN PLAYS
SERIES 3

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THE PROVINCETOWN PLAYS

THIRD SERIES:

The Two Sons: *Neith Boyce*

Lima Beans: *Alfred Kreymborg*

Before Breakfast: *Eugene O'Neill*

NEW YORK
FRANK SHAY

1916

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THE TWO SONS

A Play in One Act

By Neith Boyce

The Two Sons

A Play in One Act

BY NEITH BOYCE

As Presented by Provincetown Players,
New York City

HILDA	AUGUSTA QUIDINGTON
KARL	LEW PARISH
PAUL	RENE DE LA CHAPELLE
STELLA	AUGUSTA CARY

TIME: *The Present*

The Two Sons

PLACE:

A low room looking on the sea-nets and oilskins hanging on walls. Twilight—a stormy sky seen through the windows. Hilda stands at window looking out. She has knitting in her hands, a gray stocking.

Paul comes in, with easel and canvases which he puts down against table. Hilda looks round at him—and begins knitting, without looking at her work.

HILDA: They haven't come back.

PAUL: No, mother.

HILDA: The wind has come up strong off-shore.

PAUL: That's nothing. Karl can tack in all right.

HILDA: I can't see the boat—they must have gone outside the harbor.

PAUL: Yes. I think they were going round the Point. But they'll get in all right. (*Arranging canvases.*) Don't worry, mother.

HILDA: (*Turning toward him with a flash.*) And you—you don't worry!

PAUL: (*Quickly.*) No, mother—they're all right.

HILDA: Why didn't you go with them?

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PAUL: Well—I don't care much about sailing, you know—and then I wanted to work.

HILDA: Yes, you go on painting your pictures—no matter what happens. Perhaps you don't care—or you don't see!

PAUL: (*With an effort, studying canvas.*) Don't worry, mother.

HILDA: It would be better if you worried more. . . . Always off together—off for whole afternoons in the boat, since your brother came home—only two weeks—and now look.

PAUL: Yes—See how you like this, mother—I've been working on it today. (*Hilda comes forward, knitting rapidly, looks at picture.*)

HILDA: Yes, it's pretty enough. (*Looking at Paul.*) You're so queer, Paul—I can't understand you.

PAUL: (*Smiling faintly.*) Am I?

HILDA: Unless you don't care about her, after all. Is that it? (*Paul silently takes the canvas and goes to put it down in corner.*) But I know you do—all these years you've been fond of her. . . . Oh, Paul, don't let her be taken away from you. I can't bear it.

PAUL: (*Gently.*) Let it be, mother. . . . She hasn't been taken away—

HILDA: Yes, she has. You're blind if you can't see it.

THE PROVINCETOWN PLAYS

. . . But you *do* see—I know—Oh, Paul, don't give up, don't stand aside—you're better than *he* is. I can't have you suffer any more—I can't, I can't bear it.

PAUL: Mother dear. . . . Come, it's getting dark—
(*lights lamp.*) What's that, rain?

HILDA: Yes. (*Turning to window.*) And I can't see anything of them. I wonder if Karl will try to beat around the Point? He's so reckless—

PAUL: Oh, he's a good seaman, mother, there's no danger

HILDA: Yes—your father was a good seaman, too—but the sea took him.

PAUL: (*Quickly.*) Come, mother, let's see about supper—they'll be wet and hungry when they come.

HILDA: I won't do a thing about supper—for them. Stella can do it. . . . But I'll get something for you, Paul, in a minute, if you're hungry.

PAUL: No, I don't want anything now. I'll make you a cup of tea. (*He moves about, putting dishes on table.*)

HILDA: You're handy as a woman about the house, Paul—what would I have done without you when I was ill last year—you were so good to me.

PAUL: And weren't you good to me—all the years that I was ill? And always? . . . I've never been good for much, you know—

THE PROVINCETOWN PLAYS

HILDA: Paul, you're better than anyone! You're not like other people. You always were a strange child. . . . Sometimes it didn't seem as though you were *my* child—you didn't seem to belong to anyone. I often feel it now. You seem to live in a world of your own, not here—with us. But *this* world, Paul, you're not fitted to struggle with it. I don't know why it is—for you're not weak, it isn't that—

PAUL: Come, mother, let's have a cup of tea. (*He draws the curtains.*)

HILDA: Well—if you'll take some with me. Hark! There they come. (*Sound of a man's voice singing.*) They're gay enough. (*Door flies open and Stella and Karl come in, laughing.*)

STELLA: Oh, I'm soaked through!

KARL: There was a sea like wild horses on the Point. We had to leave the boat there and walk across.

HILDA: (*Coldly, her eyes moving from Karl to Stella.*) Well, get off your wet things—(*Karl strips off his jersey. He is in fisherman's dress, flannel shirt, corduroys and high rubber boots.*)

KARL: Didn't think it would breeze up so. I'm as hungry as a wolf. Supper ready, mother?

HILDA: (*Busy about stove, sharply.*) No, it isn't. I had no idea what time you'd be back.

STELLA: (*Going up to Hilda.*) Let me help, mother.

THE PROVINCETOWN PLAYS

HILDA: (*Sharply.*) No. Go and change (*scanning her.*) You look all blown to pieces. (*Stella shrinks back, looking at Hilda—Paul goes up to Stella, and puts his arm round her.*)

PAUL: (*Gently.*) Come along, Stella—I'll get you a light. (*Takes lamp from shelf, they go off, Stella looking back fearfully at Hilda.*)

KARL: (*Takes pipe from pocket, fills and lights it, looking steadily at Hilda. She clatters dishes on stove, glancing at him.*) What's the matter, mother?

HILDA: Yes. What's the matter! Innocent!

KARL: You're angry at me? . . . We wouldn't have been late if the wind hadn't come up—

HILDA: No, of course. Don't play the simpleton, Karl. You know well enough what you're doing.

KARL: Do I? I didn't know I was doing anything much.

HILDA: No it's nothing to you, I suppose. Nothing that you're taking your brother's promised wife away from him—just as you used to break his toys when he was a child.

KARL: Mother!

HILDA: Yes, mother! How can you do it, Karl?

KARL: How can you say such things. Lord! Because I've taken Stella out sailing a few times. When she loves sailing, and Paul's busy with his pictures.

HILDA: Oh, don't deny it. I see it—and Paul sees it. . . . It's enough, the girl's face when she looks at you!

THE PROVINCETOWN PLAYS

KARL: You're dreaming! I never thought of such a thing, never meant——

HILDA: No, I don't suppose you meant to do it. You were just perfectly careless of your brother, as you have always been——

KARL: (*Scornfully.*) So Paul is jealous, is he?

HILDA: Jealous! There isn't a mean feeling anywhere in Paul. But you've hurt him, as you have a thousand times before——

KARL: Oh, Paul, Paul, Paul! I might have known it. He's all you care for. I'm sorry I came home—I'll go tomorrow. Home! This place never was a home to me, and never will be, as long as Paul's here. (*Slams his pipe down on table. Paul has come in. He stops short—the brothers look at one another for a moment. Paul comes forward.*)

PAUL: Don't say that, Karl.

KARL: It's true! I'll go to-morrow!

PAUL: No, I won't have it so. If anybody goes, I will. I won't drive you out. Here you're just back, and mother hasn't seen you for a year——

KARL: Much she cares. It's not *you* that drives me out—*she* does it. Much she cares that she hasn't seen me for a year.

PAUL: I don't think you know, Karl, how much she cares——

THE PROVINCETOWN PLAYS

HILDA: (*Coming forward, setting dishes with a slam on table.*) Never mind about me. What I want is that you two should be brotherly to one another. Little *you* care about that. I don't mean Paul so much—Paul has tried—

KARL: Oh, yes, Paul—of course.

HILDA: It's true. Paul has always loved you—and you were never fair to him—

PAUL: Mother, please—

KARL: Yes, Paul, Paul. Paul was always the wonder-child. Oh, I know it, of course. God, I wonder if a day ever passed by in this house that I wasn't blamed for something on account of Paul.

HILDA: Or that you didn't *do* something that you shouldn't have done, to Paul. Hurt his feelings, break something he cared for, lord it over him with your strength—

PAUL: (*In a tone of command.*) Mother! (*Hilda starts; stops and looks at him.*) Stella's crying in there and won't come out—she says you're angry with her. Won't you go and talk to her?

HILDA: Yes—I'll talk to her. . . . But don't you want any supper tonight.

PAUL: By and by—we're not hungry just now. (*Hilda slams something down on stove and goes out L.*) Karl, sit down, won't you? I've something to say to you.

KARL: (*With a long hard look at Paul.*) Well? (*He*

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remains standing—lights his pipe again, nervously, breaking a match or two.)

PAUL: (*Sitting at table, rolling a cigarette.*) Karl, you mustn't take what mother says too hard. And you must *not* go away, unless you want to break her heart.

KARL: (*Stares in surprise.*) Is that what you had to say?

PAUL: That's it.

KARL: You're all wrong. She's miserable when I'm here. Nothing I do is right—it was always so and it always will be. She hates me!

PAUL: She's angry with you—she's never angry with me. But *you* are what she loves and always have been.

KARL: Pooh! (*Walks away to window.*)

PAUL: Yes—if you could have seen her, this year you've been away. All she had was your letters, once a month or so—but she watched for one every day—and she always knew where you were, ashore or afloat—and if a storm blew up here—you might be in the China Seas, but she thought of you—

KARL: (*Moodily, walking about room.*) Yes, that may be—but all the same she can't stand me. She forgets what I'm like when I'm away—but you know yourself, when I'm here, how bitter she is to me—

PAUL: And as you said, it's always something to do with me.

THE PROVINCETOWN PLAYS

KARL: (*Sullenly.*) Yes, it seems so.

PAUL: I know it's given you a hard feeling toward me. You felt she was unjust.

KARL: Yes.

PAUL: That she favored me and was hard on you—

KARL: Yes—it was always so! You were the petted one always—

PAUL: She was *sorry* for me, that's all. She felt she had to *protect* me.

KARL: Yes, against me. I wasn't the brute she made me out to be.

PAUL: You were strong and active, and you resented it in me that I wasn't—

KARL: You always had your nose in a book. I wanted to toughen you up a bit, that's all.

PAUL: But you see I had to make up to myself for what I couldn't be. I'd have liked to be like you.

KARL: (*In surprise.*) You would? . . . I thought you felt very superior to me, with your learning and your pictures. And she was always praising you.

PAUL: She tried to make up to me for what I couldn't have. She's always *pitied* me. . . . That's one kind of love. It's quite another kind that she has for you. . . . Women will always be *sorry* for me, Karl—and will love you—(*smiles bitterly.*)

THE PROVINCETOWN PLAYS

KARL: (*Sullenly.*) I don't care for women.

PAUL: Why not, Karl?

KARL: They always get a fellow into trouble. You never know where you are. (*He comes back to table, looks earnestly at Paul, holds out his hand.*) Paul, I never meant you any harm.

PAUL: (*Slowly putting up his hand to clasp Karl's with difficulty.*) I know.

KARL: (*Suddenly draws back, frowning.*) No, I'm a liar. By God, she was right after all. I didn't mean anything, but a little play, with Stella . . . and yet there was something in me that wanted to hurt you. (*Strikes the table with his fist.*)

PAUL: (*Getting up.*) Don't say that, Karl.

KARL: Yes, it's true. I wish to God I'd never come back here. I'll go tomorrow.

PAUL: No, you won't—what good would that do? . . . It's too late now.

KARL: Too late! (*He snatches his sweater and puts it on.*)

PAUL: Here, Karl. Where are you going?

KARL: Nowhere. Leave me alone. (*Plunges out the door.*)

PAUL: Karl, look here—(*rushes after him, leaving door open. After a moment Hilda comes in L., followed by*

THE PROVINCETOWN PLAYS

Stella, both looking pale and tense. Hilda stops short, looks round and at the open door.)

HILDA: (*In a low concentrated tone.*) You see. You see what you've done? Both gone. (*Goes to door and calls.*) Karl! Karl! Paul! (*Comes in, shuts the door, stands glaring at Stella.*) So one of them wasn't enough for you. Paul wasn't enough. A man worth a million of you! . . . And you dare to throw him over and reach out for——

STELLA: (*Interrupting.*) Don't say that! I haven't!

HILDA: You have. (*Comes nearer, looks Stella over from head to feet.*) I never thought much of you. Pretty, yes—and smart enough, and sweet-tempered—I've got used to having you about. . . . But when Paul brought you to me, I didn't take to you. I didn't trust you—I knew you weren't good enough for him.

STELLA: I know you thought so.

HILDA: And I was right. . . . He needed a real woman—you're only a pretty doll.

STELLA: (*Defiantly.*) That may be—I've often told him myself that I wasn't what he wanted. What he cared about wasn't *me*—it was his own dreams—

HILDA: Oh, I know he didn't see you as you are. He glorified you. . . . But he needed you—for what you call his dreams. And then you failed him—

STELLA: Yes. . . . I can't help it—I can't be what he wants.

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HILDA: And now I suppose you want Karl. But you shan't have him.

STELLA: No, that isn't true—I never thought—

HILDA: It *is* true. I've seen you look at him. You never thought. What has that to do with it? But you shan't have him. I'll send you away—

STELLA: You needn't *send* me—I'll go, now, tonight.

HILDA: Yes, go—a little rain won't hurt you.

STELLA: You're so bitter against me!

HILDA: Who wouldn't be bitter? You've come into this house and brought sorrow with you. You've waked the hatred between those two—the thing I've struggled against always.

STELLA: I meant no harm—

HILDA: No, you were just a fool—to think you could play with them both and do no harm.

STELLA: I wasn't playing with anybody. . . . It was just having a good time—(*passionately.*) He was so gay and full of life, always laughing and singing and telling queer stories—and I loved sailing with him and swimming out in deep water—he's so strong and splendid.

HILDA: (*Ironically.*) And that's all, is it? (*Stella is silent, looking away—Hilda comes a step nearer.*) You might as well tell me.

STELLA: There's nothing to tell—

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HILDA: Yes, there is. . . . I've seen your eyes on him. You never looked at Paul like that. You might as well own up to it.

STELLA: (*Looking about her wildly.*) I can't tell you—there's nothing to tell. I love Paul—I *do* love him—but we're not suited to one another.

HILDA: You didn't feel that before.

STELLA: I always felt it.

HILDA: Since Karl came home. Why don't you admit it? You think you're *better suited*—to Karl?

STELLA: Oh, let me go. (*Rushes toward door.*)

HILDA: (*Barring the way.*) Why won't you speak out?

STELLA: How can I? There's nothing—

HILDA: Yes, because *he hasn't spoken*. But if he *had*—

STELLA: (*Desperately, looking straight at Hilda.*) Well—if he *had*—

HILDA: (*Bitterly.*) Yes—I thought so. . . . But you won't get him. . . . Karl would never do that—even if he liked you better than he does. He's hard. And just because you're easy to him, he wouldn't want you.

STELLA: You're so sure.

HILDA: Yes, I'm sure. Paul is different. He doesn't look down on us in his heart—and a man like that you could throw away. I don't blame Karl for despising women—when they run after him.

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STELLA: (*Proudly.*) I shan't run after him.

HILDA: Oh, yes, you will. I've seen you, with your eyes on him. Even now you're listening—listening—for him to come.

STELLA: And you're afraid. . . . I'm going. (*Puts her cloak on.*)

HILDA: There. (*Footsteps outside—enter Karl.*) Where's your brother?

KARL: (*Curtly.*) Taking the tackle out of the rowboat—we forgot it. (*He glances at Stella, who stands looking at him. She moves toward door.*) Where are you going, Stella. (*Paul comes in, with tackle.*)

STELLA: I'm going home.

PAUL: Going? You can't go in this storm.

STELLA: I don't mind the rain. Goodbye, Paul. (*Goes quickly to door.*)

PAUL: (*Quietly.*) I'll go with you.

STELLA: No, no—I don't want you to—

PAUL: Of course I shall. (*She looks at Karl. Their eyes meet, but he does not move. She rushes out. Paul catches oilskin coat from peg and follows her. Karl looks after them, then at his mother.*)

HILDA: Where on earth have you been?

KARL: Oh—I don't know—walking up the beach.

THE PROVINCETOWN PLAYS

HILDA: Tell me! You've been—quarreling? Tell me.

KARL: Quarreling. (*A short laugh.*) No. You can't quarrel with Paul he's too darned good. That's the trouble with him, I guess. It's hard to have a saint in the family—and feel like a low-down cur yourself. (*Sits down heavily at table.*)

HILDA: (*Sharply.*) Do you mean he gives her up—to you?

KARL: (*Angrily.*) No. I don't mean anything of the kind. Do you think I want that? We weren't talking that at all. (*Hilda with a look of joy, comes and puts her arms around his shoulders.*) (*Karl ironically.*) Now you want to console me for being a cur—hey?

HILDA: No—you're not. (*Lays her cheek on his head.*) My darling. (*He puts up his hand to her slowly. She kisses his head.*)

KARL: (*Puzzled, but touched.*) What's this for mother?

HILDA: I was too hard on you—it was all *her* fault.

KARL: Now you're too hard on her. . . .

HILDA: No—if she hadn't been as she is, it wouldn't have happened.

KARL: (*Shrugs his shoulders.*) She's a nice little girl—there's no harm in her.

HILDA: There's no good in her either. . . . I wish Paul didn't care about her.

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KARL: But he does. (*Hilda is silent. She moves about, putting bread, etc. on the table. Karl turns to watch her—she touches him caressingly as she passes.*)

HILDA: Eat a bit. . . . Paul will want something too—

KARL: Perhaps he'll stay up there—

HILDA: No—he won't stay.

KARL: Why? I hope he will. (*Hilda, in silence, sits down opposite him, picks up her knitting. Karl looks at her and says moodily.*) So you think I've done it again, eh? Broken his plaything? . . . It was a bad job, my coming back—

HILDA: (*Quickly.*) No, no. . . . If only—

KARL: What?

HILDA: If only—you were good friends with Paul. If you cared about him, if you understood—

KARL: There it is again. (*With an angry gesture.*) Well, I *don't* understand him—he's like a stranger to me.

HILDA: Yes. (*Sorrowfully.*) He is to everyone—even to me.

KARL: I don't believe he cares about anything—much.

HILDA: You don't know. He does, he does. Too much. Only—not as we do, not in the same way. Things can never be as he wants them. They're not good enough, they're not what he dreams. . . . But it hurts me so—to see his dreams broken. (*She drops her knitting and gets*

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up, listening. Enter Paul back—hangs up his coat and comes to table. Karl watching him intently.)

HILDA: Sit down, Paul, have something to eat.

PAUL: Yes, mother—and you too? Can't I get you something?

HILDA: No, I'm going to bed—and you'd better go too—

PAUL: Yes, in a few minutes. *(He takes candle from shelf, lights it and brings it to table. Hilda, standing between the two, bends down to kiss Karl—then turns and kisses Paul on the forehead. Takes candle and goes to door. They watch her off—she turns at door.)*

HILDA: Good night.

KARL: Good night, mother.

PAUL: Good night. *(She goes out, when the door has closed behind her, Paul looks at Karl.)*

PAUL: Would you like a nip of whiskey, Karl?

KARL: God, yes! Have you got any?

PAUL: Yes, a little. *(Goes L., returns with small flask.)* I keep it hidden, you know—she hates to see it round, on account of father. *(Karl nods—Paul brings glasses and fills them—Karl drinks quickly.)*

KARL: That tastes good. *(Fills his glass again. Paul drinks slowly. Karl looks at him, starts to speak, stops, empties the glass and sets it down, then says nervously.)* Paul.

THE PROVINCETOWN PLAYS

PAUL: Yes?

KARL: I thought perhaps you'd stay up there——

PAUL: No.

KARL: Is it—all right?

PAUL: How do you mean?

KARL: I mean, with you and Stella?

PAUL: It will be, I guess.

KARL: Good. You've made it up, then, Paul?

PAUL: No—not that—

KARL: But you will?—it will come out right?

PAUL: I hope so—but not as you mean it, Karl.

KARL: Not—?

PAUL: It won't be as it was *before*, if you mean that.

KARL: But why not, Paul—there was nothing—nothing at all.

PAUL: Nothing?

KARL: Nothing. A little fooling, that's all. Do you mean you can't forgive?—

PAUL: It isn't a question of forgiving.

KARL: Are you so hard as that? She meant nothing with me.

PAUL: You're mistaken.

THE PROVINCETOWN PLAYS

KARL: No, Paul.

PAUL: Yes.

KARL: What makes you say that? Nothing happened between us.

PAUL: Nothing but a feeling. Everything.

KARL: You're wrong, Paul—you're wrong.

PAUL: No. She told me so herself. And I knew it before she told me.

KARL: She told you?

PAUL: Tonight. But I knew it before.

KARL: Told you—what?

PAUL: (*With difficulty.*) Not in so many words. But—she's yours—if you want her, Karl.

KARL: But Paul, Paul, it's only a fancy of hers. Why, there was nothing at all. I only kissed her once.

PAUL: (*Smiling.*) Only once?

KARL: Just in play. . . . I never meant anything—

PAUL: No—you didn't perhaps—

KARL: It's all foolishness. We're all crazy. I'll go away, Paul, and then—

PAUL: That won't change anything, Karl. . . . It was *only* a dream of mine—and its ended, that's all.

KARL: But, God, what have I done. I swear, Paul—

THE PROVINCETOWN PLAYS

PAUL: I know. It wasn't what you did. If she had—loved me—it wouldn't have happened.

KARL: But you blame me—in your heart, Paul.

PAUL: I blame—neither of you—but—you're careless, Karl.

KARL: Yes.

PAUL: About women—you're rough and careless.

KARL: Yes—well—I've knocked about so much, you see, Paul.

PAUL: And you took her—Stella—much the same as you would any other pretty girl you'd just picked up.

KARL: No, not that.

PAUL: Yes. Just rough play. You don't care for her.

KARL: I like her very much.

PAUL: You don't—love her?

KARL: No—I never thought of that.

PAUL: (*Fiercely.*) She isn't good enough for you, perhaps.

KARL: God, Paul. I don't mean anything like that. Why do you—

PAUL: I know, I know—

KARL: It's only that—I've never loved any woman—I did see one, once, that I might—but—

THE PROVINCETOWN PLAYS

PAUL: Yes—I see——

KARL: (*Looks pleadingly at Paul.*) Paul, old fellow. Paul, women are the devil. They're always making trouble. You take them too seriously—they're not worth it. Paul, they're not like you or me. They're light, every one of them—you can't count on them—I've found that out—and that's why I don't think much of them. . . . I take them for pleasure now and then—but even at that they make more trouble than they're worth—Paul. I'd rather have your friendship than all the women in the world. You're a fine fellow—you're far above me, and I've always known it. I've felt it too much sometimes—I've been jealous of you—but I love you, Paul. (*He leans across the table gripping Paul's hand with both his.*) And it's always seemed to be my fate to be wrong with you—it always was so—and now more than ever—Paul, forgive me. I always loved you, even when I was doing things to hurt you. That's why I did them, perhaps, I never could reach you—you were always off somewhere—Paul, don't hold it up against me. It's more than the love of women, my love for you.

PAUL: (*Laying his hand on Karl's shoulder.*) It's all right, old man. . . . I don't hold anything up against you—I understand.

KARL: Really? You mean that, Paul?

PAUL: I mean it.

KARL: And you know I care more about you than any-

THE PROVINCETOWN PLAYS

body? I do, by God. I admire you more and I love you more—do you believe it?

PAUL: Yes, Karl.

KARL: You may think I'm drunk—but I'm not—or only a little—if I wasn't a little drunk perhaps I wouldn't say it—but I mean it all the same.

PAUL: I believe you, Karl.

KARL: Then let's have one more drink and go to bed. (*Tilting up flask.*) There's just about one.

PAUL: Take it, Karl—I've had enough. (*Karl pours out and drinks, rising.*)

KARL: God. I feel as if I'd stood wheel for forty-eight hours. I'm done. This kind of thing is too much for me—not used to it. . . . Good night, Paul, you're the best fellow living, you're the only one that understands, by God. There's mother—but she doesn't understand—she thinks I'm all wrong—always did think so—but she's only a woman—and women, you know, Paul, they're not much—they're not deep—nothing to 'em—take my advice, Paul, and keep away from women. They'll only get you into trouble. They're all false—false as hell.

PAUL: All right, Karl, old boy. Run along now. I'll turn in too pretty soon.

KARL: Well—first let's drink—damnation—shall we? Damnation to women? (*Lifts his glass.*)

PAUL: No—I won't drink that.

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KARL: Ah, you still believe in them. Dreamer. (*Finds glass empty, puts it down, claps Paul on the shoulder, then embraces him.*) Good night, Old Paul. Best fellow in the world . . . but dreamer. (*Goes toward door, stumbles slightly.*) Dreamer. But I love you—love—(*He goes out.*)

(*Paul sits at table, looking at his glass, turning it round in his hands. A noise inside, then quiet. Paul pushes glass away, stretches his hands across the table, his fists clenched, and drops his head on his arms.*)



LIMA BEANS

A Conventional Scherzo

By Alfred Kreymborg

Lima Beans

A Conventional Scherzo

BY ALFRED KREYMBORG

As Presented by Provincetown Players,
New York City

THE WIFE MINA LOY
THE HUSBAND CARLOS WILLIAMS
THE HUCKSTER WILLIAM ZORACH

Setting Designed by the Zorachs

Lima Beans

LIMA BEANS might be defined as a pantomine dance of automatons to an accompaniment of rhythmic words, in place of music. The characters are four: husband, wife, the voice of a huckster and—the curtain! Husband and wife might be Pierrot and Columbine, if that nomenclature suits you better, or preferably, two marionnettes. The scene is a miniature dining room large enough to contain a small table, two chairs, a tiny sideboard, an open window, a closed door leading to the other rooms, and additional elbow space. Pantomine in the form of a semi-dance of gesture, in accordance with the sense more than the rhythm of the lines, is modestly indulged by husband and wife, suggesting an inoffensive parody, unless the author errs, of the contours of certain ancient Burmese dances. The reading tempo varies, slow to fast, fast to slow, in accordance with the sense more than the rhythm; the gradations might be prompted by an invisible maitre-d'orchestre. Words, silences, pantomine—all should be presented inside a homogeneous rhythmic pattern. The impedimenta of occasional rhymes are unpremeditated. If there must be a prelude of music, let it be nothing more consequential than one of the innocuous parlor rondos of Carl Maria Von Weber. As a color scheme, black and white might not prove amiss. Five-thirty P. M., American village time.

As the curtain, which by the way is painted in festoons of vegetables, rises gravely, the wife is disclosed setting the

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table for dinner. Aided by the sideboard, she has attended to her place, as witness the neat arrangement of plate, cup and saucer, and knife, fork and spoons at one side. Now, more consciously, she begins the performance of the important duty opposite. This question of concrete paraphernalia, and the action consequent thereupon, might of course be left entirely to the imagination of the beholder.

THE WIFE: (*Wistfully whimsical.*)

Put a knife here,
places a fork there—
marriage is greater than love.
Give him a large spoon,
give him a small—
you're sure of your man when you dine him.
A cup for his coffee,
A saucer for spillings,
A plate rimmed with roses
to hold his night's fillings—
roses for hearts, ah,
but food for the appetite!
Mammals are happiest home after dark!

(*The rite over, she stands off in critical admiration, her arms akimbo, her head bobbing from side to side.*) Then, seriously, as she eyes the husband's dinner plate.

But what shall I give him to eat to-night?
It mustn't be limas,
we've always had limas—
one more lima would shatter his love!

(*An answer comes through the open window from the dulcet insinuatingly persuasive horn of the huckster.*)

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THE WIFE: Oh, ah, ooh!

THE HUCKSTER: (*Singing mysteriously.*)

I got tomatoes,
I got potatoes,
I got new cabbages,
I got cauliflower,
I got red beets
I got onions,
I got lima beans—

THE WIFE: (*Who has stolen to the window, fascinated.*)
Any fruit?

THE HUCKSTER:

I got oranges,
I got pineapples,
blackberries,
currants,
blueberries,
I got bananas,
I got—

THE WIFE: Bring me some string beans!

THE HUCKSTER: Yes, mam! (*His head bobs in at the window.*)

THE WIFE: (*Takes some coins from the sideboard. A paper bag is flung into the room. The wife catches it and airily tosses the coins into the street. Presently, she takes a bowl from the sideboard, sits down, peeps into the bag, dramatically tears it open, and relapses into a gentle rocking as she strings the beans to this invocation:*

String the crooked ones,

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string the straight—
love needs a change every meal.
To-morrow, come kidney beans,
Wednesday, come white or black—
limas, return not too soon!
The string bean rules in the
vegetable kingdom,
gives far more calories, sooner digests—
love through with dinner is quicker to play!
Straight ones, crooked ones,
string beans are blessed!

(Enter the husband briskly. In consternation, the wife tries to hide the bowl, but sets it on the table and hurries to greet him. He spreads his hands and bows.)

SHE: Good evening, sweet husband!

HE: Good evening, sweet wife!

SHE: You're back, I'm so happy—

HE: So am I—'twas a day—

SHE: 'Twas a day?

HE: For a hot sweating donkey—

SHE: A donkey?

HE: A mule!

SHE: My poor, dear, poor spouse—

HE: No, no, my good mouse—

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SHE: Rest your tired, weary arms—

HE: They're not tired, I'm not weary—
I'd perspire tears and blood drops
just to keep my mouse in cheese.
In a town or in the fields,
on the sea or in a balloon,
with a pickaxe or a fiddle,
with one's back a crooked wish-bone,
occupation, labor, work—
work's a man's best contribution.

SHE: Contribution?

HE: Yes, to Hymen!

SHE: Ah yes—

HE: But you haven't—

SHE: I haven't?

HE: You haven't—

SHE: I haven't?

HE: You have *not*—

SHE: Ah yes, yes indeed!

(The wife embraces the husband and kisses him daintily six times.)

HE: Stop, queer little dear!
Why is a kiss?

SHE: I don't know.

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HE: You don't?

SHE: No!

HE: Then why do you do it?

SHE: Love!

HE: Love?

SHE: Yes!

HE: And why is love?

SHE: I don't know.

HE: You don't?

SHE: No!

HE: And why don't you know?

SHE: Because!

HE: Because?

SHE: Yes!

HE: Come, queer little dear!

(The husband embraces the wife and kisses her daintily six times.)

HE: *(Solemnly.)* And now!

SHE: *(Nervously.)* And now?

HE: And now!

SHE: And now?

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HE: And now I am hungry.

SHE: And now you are hungry?

HE: Of course I am hungry.

SHE: To be sure you are hungry, but—

HE: But?

SHE: But!

HE: But?

(The wife tries to edge between the husband and the table. He gently elbows her aside. She comes back; he elbows her less gently. This pantomime is repeated several times; his elbowing is almost rough at the last. The husband reaches the table and ogles the bowl. His head twists from the bowl to the wife, back and forth. An ominous silence.)

HE: String Beans?

SHE: String Beans!

HE: String Beans?

SHE: String Beans!

(A still more ominous silence. The husband's head begins fairly to bob, only to stop abruptly as he breaks forth:

HE: I perspire tears and blood drops
in a town or in the fields,
on the sea or in a balloon,
with my pickaxe or my fiddle,

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just to come home
footsore, starving, doubled with appetite
to a meal of—string beans?
Where are my limas? .

SHE: We had—

HE: We had?

SHE: Lima beans yesterday—we had them—

HE: We had them?

SHE: Day before yesterday—

HE: What of it?

SHE: Last Friday, last Thursday—

HE: I know it—

SHE: Last Wednesday, last Tuesday—

HE: What then, mam?

SHE: We've had them
all the way since we were married—

HE: Two weeks ago this very day—

SHE: I thought you'd have to have a change—

HE: A change?

SHE: I thought you'd like to have a change—

HE: A change?
You thought?

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I'd like?

A change?

What!

From the godliest of vegetables,
my kingly bean,
that soft, soothing,
succulent, caressing,
creamy, persuasively serene,
my buttery entity?

You would dethrone it?

You would play renegade?

You'd raise an usurper

in the person of this

elongated, cadaverous,

throat-scratching, greenish
caterpillar—

You'd honor a parochial,

menial pleb,

an accursed legume,

sans even the pretty grandeur

of cauliflower,

radish, pea,

onion, asparagus,

potato, tomato—

to the rank of household god?

Is this your marriage?

Is this your creed of love?

Is this your contribution?

Love, love,

was there some witch at the altar

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who linked your hand with mine in troth
only to have it broken in a bowl?

Ah love, love—

SHE: Love, love!

HE: You have listened to a temptress—

SHE: I have listened to my love of you—

HE: You, the pure, the angelic—

SHE: Husband, dear—

HE: Silence!

SHE: Husband!

HE: Silence!

*(The wife collapses into her chair. The husband seizes
the bowl to this maladiction:*

Worms,
snakes,
reptiles,
caterpillars,

I do not know from whence ye came,
but I know whither ye shall go.

My love,
my troth,
my faith
shall deal with ye.

Avaunt,
vanish,

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begone
from this domicile,
dedicated,
consecrated,
immortalized
in the name of Hymen!
Begone!

(The husband throws the bowl and beans out of the window. The customary crash of broken glass, off-stage, is heard. A smothered sob escapes the wife. The husband strides towards the door. The wife raises her head.)

SHE: Husband!

HE: Traitress!

SHE: Love, sweet husband!

HE: Traitress, traitress!

(The husband draws himself to his full height, glares at the wife, and slams the door behind him. The wife collapses again. Her body rocks to and fro. Silence. Then, still more mysteriously than the first time, the horn and the voice of the huckster. The wife stops rocking, raises her head and gets up. A woe begone expression vanishes before one of eagerness, of housewifely shrewdness, of joy. She steals to the window.)

THE HUCKSTER: I got oranges,
I got pineapples,
I got blackberries,
I got currants,

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I got *blueberries*,
I got *bananas*,
I got—

THE WIFE: Any vegetables?

THE HUCKSTER: I got *tomatoes*.
I got *potatoes*,
new cabbages,
cauliflower,
red beets,
I got *string beans*,
I got—

THE WIFE: Bring me some lima beans!

THE HUCKSTER: I got *tomatoes*,
I got—

THE WIFE: Bring me some lima beans!

THE HUCKSTER: Yes, mam! (*His head appears again.*)

(*The performance of paper bag and coins is repeated. Excitedly, the wife takes another bowl from the sideboard. She sits down, tears open the bag, clicks her heels, and hastily, recklessly, begins splitting the limas. One or two pop out and bound along the floor. The wife stops. Pensively:*

There you go,
hopping away,
just like bad sparrows—
no, no, more like him.

(*She smiles a little.*)

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Hopping away,
no, he's not a sparrow,
he's more like a
poor angry boy—and so soon!

(She lets the beans slip through her fingers.)

Lima beans, string beans,
kidney beans, white or black—
you're all alike—
though not all alike to him.

(She perks her head.)

It's alike to me
what's alike to him—

(She looks out of the window.)

though I'm sorry for you,
crooked strings, straight strings,
and so glad for you,
creamy ones, succulent—
what did he say of you?

(She returns to splitting the limas; with crescendo animation.)

Heigho, it's all one to me,
so he loves what I do,
I'll do what he loves.
Angry boy? No, a man
quite young in the practise
of wedlock—and love!
Come, limas, to work now—
we'll serve him, heart, appetite,
whims, crosspatches and all—
though we boil for it later!

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The dinner bell calls us,
ding, dong, ding, dell!

(The husband opens the door and pokes in his head. The wife hears him and is silent. He edges into the room and then stops, humble, contrite, abject. Almost in a whisper:

Wife!

(She does not heed him. He, louder.)

Sweet wife!

(She does not answer. He, still louder.)

Beloved,
dear, dearest wife!

(She does not answer. He approaches carefully, almost with reverence, watches her, takes the other chair and cautiously sets it down next to hers.)

HE: Wife!

SHE: Yes?

HE: Will you—
I want to—
won't you—
may I sit next to you?

SHE: Yes.

HE: I want to—
will you—
won't you
forgive me—I'll
eat all the beans in the world!

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(The wife looks up at the husband roguishly. He drops down beside her with the evident intention of putting his arm about her, only to jump up as, inadvertently, he has looked into the bowl. He rubs his eyes, sits down slowly, looks again, only to jump up again. The third time he sits down with extreme caution, like a zoologist who has come upon a new specimen of insect. The wife seems oblivious of his emotion. He rises, looks from one side of her, then the other, warily.—At last, rapturously.)

HE: Lima beans?

(She looks up tenderly and invitingly, indicating his chair.)

SHE: Lima beans!

(He sits down beside her. With greater awe and emphasis:

HE: Lima beans?

SHE: Lima beans!

(A moment of elfin silence.)

HE: Sweet wife!

SHE: Sweet husband!

HE: Where—
whence—
how did it—
how did it happen?

SHE: I don't know.

HE: You do—

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you do know—

SHE: I don't!

HE: Tiny miracle,
you do—
you're a woman,
you're a wife,
you're an imp—
you do know!

SHE: Well—

HE: Well?

SHE: Er—

HE: Eh?

SHE: Somebody—

HE: Yes, yes?

SHE: Somebody—
sent them—

HE: Sent them?

SHE: Brought them!

HE: Brought them?

SHE: Yes!

HE: Who?

SHE: Somebody!

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HE: Somebody who?

SHE: I can't tell—

HE: You can.

SHE: I—won't tell—

HE: You will—

SHE: You will—

HE: You will—

SHE: Well!

HE: Well?

SHE: You ought to know!

HE: I ought to?

SHE: You ought to—

HE: But I don't—

SHE: Yes, you do!

HE: I do not—

SHE: You do!

(The husband eyes the wife thoughtfully. She aids him with a gently mischievous smile. He smiles back in understanding.)

HE: I know!

SHE: You do not—

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HE: Yes, I do!

SHE: Are you sure?

HE: Sure enough—

SHE: Who was it?

HE: I won't tell—

SHE: You will!

(He points at the audience with warning. She nods quickly and puts her head closer to his, her wide-open eyes on the audience. He puts his head to hers, his wide-open eyes on the audience, then turns quickly and whispers something in her ear. She nods with secret, uproarious delight.)

SHE: Yes!

HE: Yes?

SHE: Yes!

(They embrace and click their heels with unrestrained enthusiasm. The wife holds out the bowl to the husband with mock solemnity. He grasps it and together they raise it above their heads, lower it to their knees, and then shell the beans with one accord. They kiss each other daintily six times. The curtain begins to quiver. As before, but accelerando.)

HE: Stop, queer little dear!
Why is a kiss?

SHE: I don't know.

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HE: You don't?

SHE: No!

HE: Then why do you do it?

SHE: Love!

HE: Love?

SHE: Yes!

HE: And why is—

(They are interrupted. The curtain comes capering down! The last we behold of the happy pair is their frantic signalling for the curtain to wait till they have finished. But curtains cannot see—or understand?)



BEFORE BREAKFAST

A Play in One Act

By Eugene G. O'Neill

Before Breakfast

A Play in One Act

BY EUGENE G. O'NEILL

As Presented by Provincetown Players,
New York City

MRS. ROWLAND MARY PYNE
ALFRED, *her husband* (not seen) EUGENE G. O'NEILL

Before Breakfast

SCENE: *A small room serving both as kitchen and dining room in flat on Christopher Street, New York City. In the rear, to the right, a door leading to the outer hallway. On the left of the doorway, a sink, and a two-burner gas stove. Over the stove and extending to the left wall, a wooden closet for dishes, etc. On the left, two windows looking out on a fire escape where several potted plants are dying of neglect. Before the windows, a table covered with oilcloth. Two cane-bottomed chairs are placed by the table. Another stands against the wall to the right of door in rear. In the right wall, rear, a doorway leading into a bedroom. Farther forward, different articles of a man's and a woman's clothing are hung on pegs. A clothes line is strung from the left corner, rear, to the right wall, forward. A man's underclothes are thrown over the line.*

It is about eight-thirty in the morning of a fine, sunny day in the early Fall.

Mrs Rowland enters from the bedroom yawning, her hands still busy putting the finishing touches on a slovenly toilet by sticking hairpins into her hair which is bunched up in a drab-colored mass on top of her round head. She is of medium height and inclined to a shapeless stoutness accentuated by her formless blue dress, shabby and worn. Her face is characterless, with small regular features and eyes of a nondescript blue. There is a pinched expression about

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her eyes and nose and her weak, spiteful mouth. She is in her early twenties but looks much older.

She comes to the middle of the room and yawns, stretching her arms to their full length. Her drowsy eyes stare about the room with the irritated look of one to whom a long sleep has not been a long rest. She goes wearily to the clothes hanging on the right and takes an apron from a hook. She ties it about her waist, giving vent to an exasperated "damn" when the knot fails to obey her clumsy, fat fingers. Finally gets it tied and goes slowly to the gas stove and lights one burner. She fills the coffee pot at the sink and sets it over the flame. Then slumps down into a chair by the table and puts a hand over her forehead as if she were suffering from headache. Suddenly her face brightens as though she had remembered something, and she casts a quick glance at the dish closet; then looks sharply at the bedroom door and listens intently for a moment or so.

MRS. ROWLAND: (*In a low voice.*) "Alfred! Alfred!" (*There is no answer from the next room and she continues suspiciously in a louder tone.*) "You needn't pretend you're asleep.

There is no reply to this from the bedroom, and, reassured, she gets up from her chair and tiptoes cautiously to the dish closet. She slowly opens one door, taking great care to make no noise, and slides out, from their hiding place behind the dishes, a bottle of Gordon gin and a glass. In doing so she disturbs the top dish which rattles a little. At this sound she starts guiltily and looks with sulky defiance at the doorway to the next room.

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MRS. ROWLAND: (*Her voice trembling.*) "Alfred!" (*After a pause during which she listens for any sound, she takes the glass and pours out a large drink and gulps it down; then hastily returns the bottle and glass to their hiding place. She closes the closet door with the same care as she had opened it, and, heaving a great sigh of relief, sinks down into her chair again. The large dose of alcohol she has taken has an almost immediate effect. Her features grow more animated, she seems to gather energy, and she looks at the bedroom door with a hard, vindictive smile on her lips. Her eyes glance quickly about the room and are fixed on a man's coat and vest which hang from a hook at right. She moves stealthily over to the open doorway and stands there, out of sight of anyone inside, listening for any movement from within.*)

MRS. ROWLAND: (*Calling in a half-whisper.*) "Alfred!" (*Again there is no reply. With a swift movement she takes the coat and vest from the hook and returns with them to her chair. She sits down and takes the various articles out of each pocket but quickly puts them back again. At last, in the inside pocket of the vest she finds a letter.*)

MRS. ROWLAND: (*Looking at the handwriting—slowly to herself.*) "Hmm! I knew it." (*She opens the letter and reads it. At first her expression is one of hatred and rage but as she goes on to the end it changes to one of triumphant malignity. She remains in deep thought for a moment, staring before her the letter in her hands, a*

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cruel smile on her lips. Then she puts the letter back in the pocket of the vest, and, still careful not to awaken the sleeper, hangs the clothes up again on the same hook, and goes to the bedroom door and looks in.)

MRS. ROWLAND: (*In a loud shrill voice.*) "Alfred!" (*Still louder.*) "Alfred!" (*There is a muffled, yawning groan from the next room.*) "Don't you think it's about time you got up? Do you want to stay in bed all day?" (*Turning around and coming back to her chair.*) "Not that I've got any doubts about your being lazy enough to stay in bed forever." (*She sits down and looks out of the window—irritably.*) ("Goodness knows what time it is. We haven't even got any way of telling the time since you pawned your watch like a fool. The last valuable thing we had, and you knew it. It's been nothing but pawn, pawn, pawn with you—anything to put off getting a job, anything to get out of going to work like a man." (*She taps the floor with her foot nervously, biting her lips.*)

MRS. ROWLAND: (*After a short pause.*) "Alfred! Get up, do you hear me? I want to make that bed before I go out. I'm sick of having this place in a continual muss of your account." (*With a certain vindictive satisfaction.*) "Not that we'll be here long unless you manage to get some money someplace. Heaven knows I do my part—and more—going out to sew every day while you play the gentleman and loaf around barrooms with that good-for-nothing lot of artists from the Square."

MRS. ROWLAND: (*After a short pause during which she*

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plays nervously with a cup and saucer on the table.) "And where are you going to get money, I'd like to know? The rent's due this week and you know what the landlord is. He won't let us stay a minute over our time. You say you *can't* get a job. That's a lie and you know it. You never even look for one. All you do is moon around all day writing silly poetry and stories that no one will buy—and no wonder they won't. I notice I can always get a position, such as it is; and it's only that which keeps us from starving to death."

MRS. ROWLAND: (*Gets up and goes over to the stove—looks into the coffee pot to see if the water is boiling; then comes back and sits down again.*) "You'll have to get money today someplace. I can't do it all, and I won't do it all. You've got to come to your senses. You've got to beg, borrow, or steal it somewheres." (*With a contemptuous laugh.*) "But where, I'd like to know? You're too proud to beg, and you've borrowed the limit, and you haven't the nerve to steal."

MRS. ROWLAND: (*After a pause—getting up angrily.*) "Aren't you up yet, for heaven's sake? It's just like you to go to sleep again, or pretend to." (*She goes to the bedroom door and looks in.*) "Oh, you are up. Well, it's about time. You needn't look at me like that. Your airs don't fool me a bit any more. I know you too well—better than you think I do—you and your goings-on." (*Turning away from the door—meaningly.*) "I know a lot of things, my dear. Never mind what I know, now. I'll tell you

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before I go, you needn't worry." (*She comes to the middle of the room and stands there frowning.*)

MRS. ROWLAND: (*Irritably.*) "Hmm! I suppose I might as well get breakfast ready—not that there's anything much to get." (*Questioningly.*) "Unless you have some money? (*She pauses for an answer from the next room which does not come.*) "Foolish question!" (*She gives a short, hard laugh.*) "I ought to know you better than that by this time. When you left here in such a huff last night I knew what would happen. You can't be trusted for a second. A nice condition you came home in! The fight we had was only an excuse for you to make a beast of yourself. What was the use pawning your watch if all you wanted with the money was to waste in buying drink?"

MRS. ROWLAND: (*Goes over to the dish closet and takes out plates, cups, etc. while she is talking.*) "Hurry up! It don't take long to get breakfast these days, thanks to you. All we got this morning is bread and butter and coffee; and you wouldn't even have that if it wasn't for me sewing my fingers off." (*She slams the loaf of bread on the table with a bang.*) "The bread's stale. I hope you'll like it. You don't deserve any better, but I don't see why I should suffer."

MRS. ROWLAND: (*Going over to the stove.*) "The coffee'll be ready in a minute, and you needn't expect me to wait for you." (*Suddenly with great anger.*) "What on earth are you doing in there all this time?" (*She goes over to the door and looks in.*) "Well, you're almost dressed at any rate. I expected to find you back in bed."

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That'd be just like you. How awful you look this morning! For heaven's sake, shave! You're disgusting! You look like a tramp. No wonder no one will give you a job. I don't blame them—when you don't even look half way decent." (*She goes to the stove.*) "There's plenty of hot water right here. You've got no excuse." (*Gets a bowl and pours some of the water from the coffee pot into it.*) "Here." (*He reaches his hand into the room for it. It is a beautiful, sensitive hand with slender, tapering fingers. It trembles and some of the water spills on the floor.*)

MRS. ROWLAND: (*Tauntingly.*) "Look at your hand tremble! You'd better give up drinking. You can't stand it. It's just your kind that get the D.T's. *That would be the last straw!*" (*Looking down at the floor.*) "Look at the mess you've made of this floor—cigarette butts and ashes all over the place. Why can't you put them on a plate? No, you wouldn't be considerate enough to do that. You never think of me. You don't have to sweep the room and that's all you care about." (*Takes the broom and commences to sweep viciously, raising a cloud of dust. From the inner room comes the sound of a razor being stropped.*)

MRS. ROWLAND: (*Sweeping.*) "Hurry up! It must be nearly time for me to go. If I'm late I'm liable to lose my position, and then I couldn't support you any longer." (*As an afterthought she adds sarcastically.*) "And then you'd have to go to work or something dreadful like that." (*Sweeping in under the table.*) "What I want to know is

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whether you're going to look for a job today or not. You know your family won't help us any more. They've had enough of you, too."

MRS. ROWLAND: (*After a moment's silent sweeping.*) "I'm about sick of all this life. I've a good notion to go home, if I wasn't too proud to let them know what a failure you've been—you, the millionaire Rowland's only son, the Harvard graduate, the poet, the catch of the town—Huh!" (*With bitterness.*) "There wouldn't be many of them now envy my catch if they knew the truth. What has our marriage been, I'd like to know? Even before your *millionaire* father died owing everyone in the world money, you certainly never wasted any of your time on your wife. I suppose you thought I'd ought to be glad you were *honorable* enough to marry me—after getting me into trouble. You were ashamed of me with your fine friends because my father's only a grocer, that's what you were. At least he's honest, which is more than anyone could say about your's." (*She is sweeping steadily toward the door.*)

MRS. ROWLAND: (*Leans on her broom for a moment.*) "You hoped everyone'd think you'd been forced to marry me, and pity you, didn't you? You didn't hesitate much about telling me you loved me, and making me believe your lies, before it happened, did you? You made me think you didn't want your father to buy me off as he tried to do. I know better now. I haven't lived with you all this time for nothing." (*Somberly.*) "It's lucky the poor thing was born dead, after all. What a father you'd have been!"

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MRS. ROWLAND: (*Is silent, brooding moodily for a moment—then she continues with a sort of savage joy.*) “But I’m not the only one who’s got you to thank for being unhappy. There’s one other, at least, and *she* can’t hope to marry you now.” (*She puts her head into the next room.*) “How about Helen?” (*She starts back from the doorway, half frightened.*) “Don’t look at me that way!. Yes, I read her letter. What about it? I got a right to. I’m your wife. And I know all there is to know, so don’t lie. You needn’t stare at me so. You can’t bully me with your superior airs any longer. Only for me you’d be going without breakfast this very morning.” (*She sets the brooms back in the corner—whiningly.*) “You never did have any gratitude for what I’ve done.” (*She comes to the stove and puts the coffee into the pot.*) “The coffee’s ready. I’m not going to wait for you.” (*She sits down in her chair again.*)

MRS. ROWLAND: (*After a pause—puts her hand to her head—fretfully.*) “My head aches so this morning. It’s a shame I’ve got to go to work in a stuffy room all day in my condition. And I wouldn’t if you were half a man. By rights I ought to be lying on my back instead of you. You know how sick I’ve been this last year; and yet you object when I take a little something to keep up my spirits. You even didn’t want me to take that tonic I got at the drug store.” (*With a hard laugh.*) “I know you’d be glad to have me dead and out of your way; then you’d be free to run after all these silly girls that think you’re such a wonderful, misunderstood person—this Helen and the

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others." (*There is a sharp exclamation of pain from the next room.*)

MRS. ROWLAND: (*With satisfaction.*) "There! I knew you'd cut yourself. It'll be a lesson to you. You know you oughtn't to be running around nights drinking with your nerves in such an awful shape." (*She goes to the door and looks in.*) "What makes you so pale? What are you staring at yourself in the mirror that way for? For goodness sake, wipe that blood off your face!" (*With a shudder.*) "It's horrible." (*In relieved tones.*) "There, that's better. I never could stand the sight of blood." (*She shrinks back from the door a little.*) "You better give up trying and go to a barber shop. Your hand shakes dreadfully. Why do you stare at me like that?" (*She turns away from the door.*) "I'll give you fifteen cents—only promise you won't buy a drink with it. Are you still mad at me about that letter?" (*Defiantly.*) "Well, I had a right to read it. I'm your wife." (*She comes over to the chair and sits down again.*)

MRS. ROWLAND: (*After a pause.*) "I knew all the time you were running around with someone. Your lame excuses about spending the time at the library didn't fool me. Who is this Helen, anyway? One of those artists? Or does she write poetry, too? Her letter sounds that way. I'll bet she told you your things were the best ever, and you believed her, like a fool. Is she young and pretty? I was young and pretty, too, when you fooled me with your fine, poetic talk; but life with you would soon wear anyone down. What I've been through!"

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MRS. ROWLAND: (*Goes over and takes the coffee off the stove.*) "Breakfast is ready." (*With a contemptuous glance.*) "Breakfast!" (*Pours out a cup of coffee for herself and puts the pot on the table.*) "Your coffee'll be cold. What are you doing—still shaving, for heaven's sake? You'd better give it up. One of these mornings you'll give yourself a serious cut."

MRS. ROWLAND: (*She cuts off bread and butters it. During the following speeches she eats and sips her coffee.*) "I'll have to run as soon as I've finished eating. One of us has got to work." (*Angrily.*) "Are you going to look for a job today or aren't you? I should think some of your fine friends would help you, if they really think you're so much. But I guess they just like to hear you talk."

MRS. ROWLAND: (*Sits in silence for a moment.*) "I'm sorry for this Helen, whoever she is. Haven't you got any feelings for other people? What will her family say? I see she mentions them in the letter. What is she going to do—have the child—or go to one of those doctors? That's a nice thing, I must say. Where can she get the money? Is she rich?"

MRS. ROWLAND: (*She waits for some answer to this volley of questions.*) "Hmm! You won't tell me anything about her, will you? Much I care. Come to think of it, I'm not so sorry for her, after all. She knew what she was doing. She isn't any school girl, like I was, from the looks of her letter. Does she know you're married? Of course, she must. All your friends know about your

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unhappy marriage. I know they pity you, but they don't know my side of it. They'd talk different if they did."

MRS. ROWLAND: (*Too busy eating to go on for a second or so.*) "This Helen must be a fine one, if she knew you were married. What does she expect, then? That I'll divorce you and let her marry you? Does she think I'm crazy enough for that—after all you've made me go through? I guess not! And you can't get a divorce from me and yo know it. No one can say *I've* ever done anything wrong."

MRS. ROWLAND: (*Drinks the last of her cup of coffee.*) "She deserves to suffer, that's all I can say. I'll tell you what I think: I think your Helen is no better than a common street-walker, that's what I think." (*There is a stifled groan of pain from the next room.*)

MRS. ROWLAND: "Did you cut yourself again? Serves you right. Why don't you go to a barber shop when I offer you the money?" (*Gets up and takes off her apron.*) "Well, I've got to run along." (*Peevishly.*) "This is a fine life for me to be leading! I won't stand for your loafing any longer." (*Something catches her ear and she pauses and listens intently.*) "There! You've overturned the water all over everything. Don't say you haven't. I can hear it dripping on the floor." (*A vague expression of fear comes over her face.*) "Alfred! Why don't you answer me?" (*She moves slowly toward the room. There is the noise of a chair being overturned and something crashes heavily to the floor...She stands, trembling with*

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fright.) "Alfred! Alfred! Answer me! What is it you knocked over? Are you still drunk?" (Unable to stand the tension a second longer she rushes to the door of the bedroom.) "Alfred!" (She stands in the doorway looking down at the floor of the inner room, transfixed with horror. Then she shrieks wildly and runs to the other door, unlocks it and frenziedly pulls it open, and runs shrieking madly into the outer hallway as

The Curtain Falls.



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